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ABSTRACT

The harm that can transpire during and after the fieldwork phase of research is examined, and the ethical obligations of qualitative researchers to respond are explored. Recognition that research has the potential to harm has led the research community to develop philosophical guidelines for ethical conduct. Qualitative researchers have also developed procedures for ethical conduct, bearing in mind that qualitative research alters the traditional relationship between researcher and researched and does not allow the researcher to remain a detached spectator. Experiences noted during a 15-month ethnographic study of development of community among college students and the acculturation of students in a college fraternity illustrate potential areas in which the research process could do harm. Analysis of these experiences suggests that researchers have an ethical obligation to forewarn participants of inevitable harm and an ethical responsibility to interact with respondents after the fieldwork is complete. Some harm is an inevitable outcome of fieldwork, and professional standards, administrative practices, and methodology are a necessary but insufficient guide for practice. Researchers must retain sensitivity to issues of harm and communicate openly with respondents. (Contains 22 references.) (SLD)

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Doing Harm: Unintended Consequences of Fieldwork

Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association

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Atlanta, Georgia

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Introduction

In 1967, Howard Becker raised an important ethical dilemma for fieldworkers — harming respondents. He noted that in fieldwork, the question is not whether harm will result but who will be harmed [Van Maanen, 1983]. Efforts to minimize harm have focused on the fieldwork phase of research. The potential for harm also exists after the fieldworker completes his/her work and leaves the field. Respondents' interpretations of and reactions to the researcher's findings often create harmful consequences at a point when the fieldworker is absent. This paper examines the harm that transpires during and after the fieldwork phase of research and the ethical obligations of qualitative researchers to respond. Three ethical questions are explored — What constitutes harm? Do qualitative researchers have an ethical obligation to forewarn participants of this inevitable harm? and Do qualitative researchers have an ethical obligation to deal with the aftermath of their findings? Two qualitative research studies serve as a context for exploring these issues.

Meeting ethical obligations through professional standards, administrative practices and methodological procedures

Recognition that research has the potential to harm has led the research community to act. Professional organizations such as the American Anthropological Association, American Sociological Association, and the American Psychological Association developed philosophical guidelines for ethical conduct. Largely, these standards were developed to prevent tragedies such as the Tuskegee study. In this 1932 study, the United States Public Health Service conducted a study of African American men infected with syphilis. Some participants were led to believe that they were being treated for syphilis, but in fact were part of a control group and received no treatment [Regulations Governing Research, 1981]. The outrage produced by this type of study led to professional standards regarding consent, coercion, confidentiality, and deception.

Funding agencies of the federal government and human subject review committees on college campuses operationalized these philosophical constructs and mandated guidelines for

researchers' interactions with human subjects. For example, The National Research Act passed by Congress in 1974, required all research sponsored with Health, Education, and Welfare funds to undergo a review procedure as a condition for the award [Arnold, 1992]. Research reviewers requested information such as the purpose of the study, a description of the subjects; a list of potential risks and benefits; and procedures related to recruitment and selection, consent, and confidentiality. The goal of these procedures was to translate ethical standards into practice.

Qualitative research methodologists also developed procedures that augment existing standards and research review committee practices. Because the relationship between the researcher and respondents is reframed, based on ontological and epistemological assumptions of the constructivist paradigm [Lincoln and Guba, 1985], qualitative researchers devised unique procedures to avoid harm. Qualitative research alters the traditional relationship between the researcher and respondents; it does not allow the researcher to act as a detached spectator, someone who remains apart from that which he/she is studying. The relationship is an interactive one that seeks reciprocal understanding between the researcher and respondents. It is a sense of caring for respondents as humans rather than subjects or objects of study. On the basis of this reframing, qualitative researchers conceptualized procedures such as member checks and triangulation techniques to reduce the likelihood of doing harm.

Some qualitative and quantitative researchers fulfill their ethical obligations by adhering to professional organizational standards, localized administrative practices, and qualitative methodological procedures. Plummer [Glesne and Peshkin, 1992] refers to such researchers as ethical absolutists. An absolutist "relies heavily on professional codes of ethics and seeks to establish firm principles to guide all social science research" [Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, p.125]. A number of dilemmas are inherent in this absolutist approach.

One dilemma with the absolutist use of procedures is the creation of a false sense of security related to doing harm. A brief story about my [Peter] encounter with a university's Human Subject Committee substantiates this point. In the fall of 1992, one of the first steps I

took after gaining the approval of my dissertation committee was to begin the ritual of completing the university's human subject form. The fifteen page "very fine print" document immediately tempered my excitement for this new research project. My initial reactions were both relief and frustration. The good news was my research did not involve fetal tissue, extracting teeth, or drawing human blood samples, thus truncating the approval procedures. The bad news was that I was left with the impression that beyond tending to my respondents' rights, there was little harm to be concerned about in my project. The forms did not prepare me for the ethical dilemmas awaiting me in the field. Because harm was defined as physical or mental abuse, blatant violation of privacy, and ill-informed consent, the review process implicitly communicated that participant-observation research was relatively innocuous on the "harm continuum," and underestimated the potential for negative consequences.

A second dilemma is that the absolutist approach does not adequately account for qualitative researchers' focus on the particular. Some researchers, called situational relativists by Plummer [Glesne and Peshkin, 1992], believe that the solutions to ethical dilemmas cannot be prescribed by absolute guidelines but have to be based on the specific context. Smith's [1989] comment about qualitative methods is also sage advice for the qualitative researcher concerned about ethics. He stated — "An interpretive researcher cannot come to a study with a pre-established set of neutral procedures but can only choose to do some things as opposed to others based on what seems to be reasonable given his or her interest and purposes, the context of the situation and so on" [pp. 156-7]. Situational relativists view standards as necessary minimum guides rather than a prescription since they believe that each research situation is unique. They recognize that ethical dilemmas, by their nature, defy easy prescriptive solutions.

The researcher-respondent relationship: An accessory to harm

The inadequacies of absolutist ethical standards in qualitative research stem largely from the unique relationship between the researcher and respondents. Guba and Lincoln [1989] indicated that the nature of qualitative inquiry is such that the relationship between the

researcher and respondent is paramount and takes precedence over traditional goals such as the quest for truth. Goodness is based on a cultivated relationship with respondents based on dignity and respect, not on distance from respondents or a researcher's "objective" stance. Reinharz [1978] described the researcher-respondent relationship in qualitative research as a "lover model," built on face-to-face contact, mutual respect, trust, and mutual negotiation rather than a "rape model," where the researcher takes what is desired and leaves. Arguably the rape metaphor may be exaggerated, but the lover metaphor captures this unique relationship. Anyone who has been in a love relationship recognizes that the desire to do no harm is easier said than done.

Describing rich cultural, interpersonal, and social contexts through interpretation and narrative description, a classic purpose of qualitative research, inevitably involves ethical dilemmas [Clifford and Marcus, 1986]. While intimately participating in the daily lives of respondents, fieldworkers hear confidences. To varying extents, they are trusted and see circumstances that can lead to harm. Their actions and inactions l can lead, unintentionally, to deceit. Fieldworkers pretend to participate or not to participate emotionally, observe even when appearing not to be doing so, and ask questions with covert purposes of which respondents are probably not aware [Gans, 1968]. Respondents supply information that is important, often unknowingly. Promising confidentiality to one respondent may inadvertently compromise another. We clearly make moral choices in the field when deciding what data to record, how to get data, and with whom to talk [Van Maanen, 1983]. Fieldworkers negotiate ethical dilemmas with respondents, sometimes knowingly and sometimes unknowingly, during face-to-face and day-to-day interactions. All of these circumstances render the researcher-respondent interaction unique and context bound. As a result, using the absolutist approach does not suffice in minimizing harm. An examination of confessional tales [Van Maanen, 1988] based on fieldwork highlights the inadequacies of absolutists' reliance solely on ethical standards and illuminates how the researcher-respondents relationship complicates the quest for doing no harm.

Understanding harm: Fieldwork exemplars

Peter's stories are based on a 15 month ethnographic study of college students enrolled in a residential college. It is a response to the Carnegie Foundation report *College* [Boyer 1987], which concluded that one of the most urgent obligations colleges confront is to build a sense of community — a sense of belonging at the institution. To better understand "community" the study examines the ways college students constitute a community, the ways students balance the tension between individual and community needs, and values that guide practices. The setting for this study is a residential college within a public university in Ohio. The program consists of 13 full-time faculty and over 300 students. Its mission is to provide a strong undergraduate interdisciplinary education.

Brenda studied a college fraternity's acculturation at a large midwestern university. She focused on fraternity rituals, practices for socializing new members during pledgeship, and new members' rites of passage into the organization. Her fieldwork was conducted with a colleague who was a "brother" and is a life loyal member of the fraternity.

Both studies used three methods of data collection — participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and artifact review. Peter participated and observed daily events [e.g., classes, meetings, and meals] and annual rituals [e.g., convocation and graduation], interviewed faculty and staff, and studied artifacts ranging from historical documents stored in the school's archives to artwork displayed throughout the residential college. Brenda attended rush weekend activities, attended formal and informal fraternity sponsored activities and on numerous occasions dined at the fraternity house. She conducted extensive interviews with rushees, pledges, active members, officers, and alumni. Finally, she examined and analyzed various documents including the fraternity pledge and reference manuals, issues of the fraternity magazine, and correspondence and documents from the national organization. Within these contextual fieldwork settings, we consider the risk of unintended harm to respondents during the fieldwork and writing phases of research.

Do gatekeepers really understand harm?

I [Peter] arrived a few minutes early for my meeting and proceeded directly to the main office, introduced myself to the secretary, and sat down on a couch that faced her desk. We politely chatted for a moment, then she returned to her work. The voices emanating from the inner office suggested that a meeting was in progress. Newsletters and some toys cluttered the coffee table in front of me. My first inclination was to tinker with the Rubric's cube puzzle or play with the kaleidoscope. Instead, I perused the written materials scattered about the table, then reviewed my outline for the meeting. I was nervous about this meeting; gaining this gatekeeper's approval was a critical linchpin in my quest for access to this residential college. My outline carefully incorporated "ethical considerations" recommended by the American Anthropological Society with "gaining access" strategies discussed in most qualitative research methodology books. I was prepared to discuss: who I was, what I wanted to do, why I wanted to do this study, why I chose this site, how I planned to conduct my fieldwork, what I planned to do with my findings, and what respondents might gain from this study. Typed at the bottom of my outline under the heading "Reminders" was a list — [1] promise confidentiality, [2] stress the study will not be disruptive, [3] talk about my preference for overt rather than covert research, [4] find out their expectations, and [5] mention possible risks.

The opening of the Associate Dean's office door interrupted my pre-meeting review session. The Associate Dean [AD] of the college greeted me as we entered his office. He knew of my interest in studying the school and appeared genuinely receptive. The window air conditioner, set on "Hi-Cool," drowned-out our introductions and small talk about the campus budget crisis, vacation plans, and town gossip. Eventually, the conversation drifted from gossip to my research project. I began my presentation by introducing the idea of doing a year long educational ethnography, then globally sketched out the focus of the study and reason for the selection of this site. Before I could address the specifics of my proposal, the AD commented that he thought the study was a good idea. His recommended course of action was

to develop an abstract for the school's faculty to review and to complete the university human subjects forms. The AD's receptivity pleased me, while his lack of concern about the specifics of my research was worrisome. At the time, I felt like an understudy for a lead role in a play. I knew my lines but probably would never get an opportunity to recite them in public.

Our meeting lasted about an hour. As I exited the building, I processed the meeting. The first thing that struck me was the incompatibility between gaining access and discussing harm. I wanted to talk more about doing harm, but the topic was not germane to the conversation. I was granted permission so readily that I did not want to jeopardize the opportunity by talking about issues of harm despite the gatekeeper's openness and support. Complicating this dilemma was that I had no idea what the specifics of harm might be and the gatekeeper did not know of what to be fearful. At best, my warning could be as specific as those on a package of cigarettes — "Warning: Qualitative research may be hazardous to your health." The gatekeepers' attitude led me to believe he would pay about as much heed to this warning as do cigarette smokers. Rhoades [1991] comment, "... researchers cannot fully anticipate and warn researchees of all that will come out of the research" [p. 243], did little to relieve my guilt. Roth [1962] questioned whether there can ever be full disclosure, and explained that "all research is secret in some ways and to some degree — we never tell the subjects 'everything.'" I was not sure if I told the gatekeeper "anything," as it related to harm.

Do respondents really understand harm?

A few months into my [Peter] study, I formally interviewed students and faculty members. During our first meeting, I verbally explained the purpose of the study, provided a one page summary of the study, and had participants sign a consent form. A few weeks later, I shared with participants the interview transcript [if I had recorded the interview]. The intent of this strategy was to allow for factual corrections such as misspelled names, to affirm interviewees' right to delete any portion of the transcript that they did not want included in the ethnography, and to continue dialogue. Often participants were confused about what I would be doing with my observations and interview transcripts, even after the in-depth verbal and

written explanations. For example, on one occasion a few days after a second meeting with a student, she ran up to me in the hall. A portion of the transcript abhorred her — where she indicated a school administrator looked and acted like Adolph Hitler. She was particularly concerned about the quotation — "He is always trying to keep order. He is the anal force in the community." She acknowledged that she made the comment but wanted to know what I was going to do with it. The woman wanted to make certain that I would conceal her identity should I use the quotation. "I have to be in this place for three more years, I don't want to get on anyone's shit list." I told her that if she was uncomfortable with the comments, I would be sure to make no reference to them in the text.

Throughout my field study [Brenda], I often questioned whether respondents understood what they had given me permission to do. I shared with the fraternity the intent of the fieldwork project during a business meeting as well as individually when each respondent signed a consent form. However, respondents frequently asked questions that indicated they did not clearly understand the purpose of the work. Cassell [1980] and Smith [1990] questioned what respondents really understand about the consent they give when agreeing to participate in fieldwork. Since the nature of field research is so different from experimental approaches, many do not understand what we as fieldworkers are trying to do.

As can be seen in Peter's and Brenda's stories, member checks surfaced the shortcoming of consent procedures and began to identify potential candidates for harm. In Peter's story it was the "Hitler-like" administrator and the student who made the comment. In Brenda's it was virtually all members of the fraternity. The complexities evident in these stories surpass the guidance offered by the professional, administrative, and methodological procedures.

Understanding harm: Post-fieldwork exemplars

The aforementioned stories raise the question whether gatekeepers and respondents can really understand harm. This section explores whether qualitative researchers really understand

harm. The context for exploring this question is the writing and findings-dissemination phases of the research.

Researchers' relationships with respondents in the field differ greatly from the relationships they have with them after they leave the field. In the field researchers share mutual time, situations, and places. During face-to-face interaction they negotiate the direction of information sharing, responding jointly to nonverbal cues as well as verbal exchanges. Interactive processes dominate doing fieldwork — providing respondents opportunities to influence the process. While on site researchers can often sense when respondents are alienated, ostracized, or potentially harmed by what they do. However, relationships and communication with respondents change when researchers leave the field and begin the process of writing. Forecasting the consequences of fieldwork findings is problematic. Writing interpretations, descriptions, and narratives, silence respondents and put them at risk. Concurrently, some respondents and others might be put at risk by our silence. The prospect of doing good and the challenge to avoid harming respondents is formidable.

Do authors really understand harm to the individual?

Anonymity of individual and collectivities can be especially important when researchers engage in critical research. We both became interested in the brothers' perception that their fraternity was diverse. We saw all white faces in the composite picture of the brothers. We saw brothers wearing similar attire and acting in uniform ways. We saw six non-white rushees denied bids to the house. It seemed that Baier and Whipple's [1990] assertion that fraternity life provides "a safe 'harbor' for those who seek conformity, family dependence, social apathy, and extensive involvement in extracurricular activities" fit this fraternity. Excerpts from one interview I conducted with a fraternity brother captures his notion of diversity:

While sitting on the sofa in the living room I noticed a man in white Bermuda shorts and a Greek navy t-shirt walk by me a few times, trying, I interpreted, to inconspicuously get my attention. It worked. I stopped writing, looked up, smiled, and said hello. On close observation his t-shirt had on it, above his chest pocket, "Screw Your Roommate Hat Dance."

He returned a smile and said "Hi." John was from St. Louis, as was a contingent of about 30 brothers living in the house. He explained some people in this house resent St. Louis guys, "but overall we get along." John wanted to be an entertainment lawyer. He planned to live in Beverly Hills someday. He had a stocky build, short blond hair, blue eyes. He looked like a football player. I liked John. He appeared honest and open.

When asked about pledgeship John responded, "It's the best thing you never want to do again." Many times while we talked John responded with robotized phrases. I perceived that these statements had great value for John. I sensed that he would have great difficulty explaining without them.

Discussion turned to an article in a recent Beta magazine that disputed a long-time rumor that Beta's founding fathers were Ku Klux Klan members. The article denied that one founding father was a Grand Dragon. My colleague asked John if there are any blacks in the frat. John replied, "No, and I'm glad of it." He went on to explain that last year two blacks were in the pledge class. According to John, one stole things from other brothers, was found out, and left the house on his own after having been discovered. "There's lots of tension between blacks and whites in St. Louis and I just don't like them," John explained. "I'm glad they're not in this house just like I'm sure they are glad whites aren't in their frat houses." Moments after this conversation, we talked about the diversity of the frat, and how good that diversity was. John explained that all kinds of academic majors were represented in the house.

Insiders would have been able to identify John if I had included the interview in the fieldwork report. I felt John's perspective was an important one to include and wanted to do so. Prejudice in the fraternity was often implicit in the study but in this situation John made it explicit. Would I be using John as a means to expose the prejudice of a fraternity brother? Lincoln [1990] suggested that it is not necessary to use others; instead we can engage them. Soltis [1990] explained that there is something about qualitative research that depends upon using others as a means to the researcher's ends. Because "John" would be identified by brothers who read the report, I felt ethically compelled to omit his racially biased statements.

Yet omission of this, and other signs of racial purity, made the materials concerning the "diversity" of the organization somewhat obscure if not inaccurate. Protecting the identity of respondents while not compromising the story is a challenging task.

Peter tells a similar story of comments a second year student made while behind closed doors. Linus and Dylan's room door was ajar. They invited me [Peter] into their room. The fan on the window's ledge was oscillating at full speed, but it did little to eliminate sticky humid air that hung heavy in the room. Linus opened a bottle of beer, then closed his door. Dylan offered me a root beer. I accepted. He then poured some root beer into his glass, then added rum. Juan, a neighbor, knocked on the door, then without waiting for a response entered the room. He announced that there was a bat flying around the main corridor and that the party [a college sponsored event] was finally getting crowded. "There is a lot of new snatch down there. Some of the girls have on really short skirts." Juan pointed to his upper thigh to further make his point. Sensing my "disapproving" facial expression, he continued — "I can talk anyway I want because the faculty don't have any power over me. ... I am not taking any more fucking classes here. I don't gotta be a fucking gender sensitive guy any more." Juan's comments succinctly illuminate one of many perspectives on male/female relations, faculty-student interactions, conformity to politically correct ideas, students' and perceptions of the classes.

I thought long and hard about whether to include this brief passage. I first checked with Juan, who said it was "no problem." I included it in a draft I circulated to respondents for their comments. On more than one occasion, students reading the account immediately identified the individual — "I know who 'Juan' is." Students' commentaries about Juan's comments were less than flattering. Does the potential harm to Juan outweigh the goal of capturing the cultural ethos of the residential college?

When fieldwork observations are published or made public by other means, respondents could be harmed. Anticipating such problems, fieldworkers try to disguise individual identities in the report. It can be difficult in some situations to disguise individuals

from other insiders and as a result interpersonal relations could be harmed. Should we, as Gregory [1990] asks, knowingly damage an individual for the betterment of many? Or must we uphold the dignity of the individual at all costs?

Anonymity of individuals and collectivities can create tension with the desire to write thick, rich description. Lincoln and Guba [1989] explained — "we know that privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality are virtually impossible to guarantee in qualitative case studies that are of high fidelity" [p. 221]. Similarly, Eisner [1991] noted that in good qualitative research — "The people described become real, and even if no one can identify the situations or people studied, those studied can: hence, the potential for pain and elation is always there" [p. 221]. It is critical for researchers to understand the limits of confidentiality before it is guaranteed and to recognize that publishing fieldwork observations and interviews could have harmful effects on individuals involved even when fieldworkers disguise identities.

Do authors really understand harm to the community?

Past efforts to minimize harm focused on the individual. The primary concern of professional organizational standards, localized administrative practices, and qualitative methodological procedures is the individuals with whom the researcher interacts. Publication of findings has the potential to unintentionally harm not only the individual respondents, as noted in previous section, but larger social systems. In the context of our studies the larger social systems would include the residential college and the fraternity. Excerpts from Peter's story of a Resident Assistant [an undergraduate paraprofessional] meeting with new students to discuss rules and regulations of the residence hall further clarifies this point.

> Vis [visitation]— it ends at midnight and two. I am not going to bother you if you are in your room. The RAs will jingle their keys when they are coming so that you can close your door. We are not trying to ruin your fun. Just make sure to stay out of the corridor. ... No one is 21 so you can't drink alcohol. If you do you will suffer the consequences. I can't change your lifestyle. I drank and got in trouble. It did not affect me becoming an RA. The university has services like counseling, alcohol help. Have fun but be smart. ... If you hear a fire alarm--get out. Try not to get in trouble. If you feel compelled to break the rules, don't let me see it. I don't want to be the police. I will try to help you

> resolve your conflicts, but try to work them out amongst yourself. I don't get paid enough to police you.

This narrative tale that reveals the discretionary policy enforcement practices of a Resident Assistant has the potential to harm not only the RA, but the entire residential college. I was able to protect the anonymity of the RA [although many insiders reading the story immediately knew the identity of the RA] but the publishing of the story increased the risk that future RAs may be under closer scrutiny from supervisors. The story could provide fodder for university community members who oppose the residential college's autonomy from the larger university community.

My [Brenda] vivid tales of rush weekends, fraternity dinners, membership selection meetings, and pledge initiation illuminated positive aspects of fraternity life [friendship, academic support, and leadership training]. These stories also surfaced the darker sides of Greek life as well such as discrimination, alcohol abuse, hazing, and intolerance of diversity. Telling the latter stories that highlighted illegal activities may force college administrators to act. Revelations about the discriminatory selection processes and hazing have the potential to perpetuate fraternity stereotypes and harm not only this particular fraternity and its members, but all fraternities. At the same time, there are ethical implications should the researcher ignore them.

One might argue that the publication of any research finding [qualitative or quantitative] has the potential to harm. We would agree. But the thickly described tale of an RA explaining ways to by-pass policies attracts more attention than the statistic that 75% of all RAs do not enforce university policy Similarly a graphic tale of fraternity members alcohol consumption behaviors at a fraternity party is more powerful than a statistic that asserts that over 90% of all fraternity members consume alcohol. There is a need to look beyond the individual and consider the harm that looms for the larger social system.

Do authors really understand harm to themselves?

Thus far, we examined harm to the individual and larger social systems during the writing process. We conclude with an examination of the harm the author may inflict on her/him self.

Throughout my [Brenda] fieldwork, respondents I interviewed spoke freely about their fraternity experience. An implied intimacy developed as pledges and actives shared with me perceptions of experience that many described as the most influential times of their lives. Their disclosures sometimes appalled and often amused me. Nevertheless, I listened attentively. These respondents' straightforwardness surprised me since there was considerable negative press about fraternity alcohol abuse throughout the period of the study. They spoke profusely about hazing practices, alcohol abuse, and the fraternity's system of knowing when the Dean of Students would show up for what should have been an unexpected visit. They knew hazing and alcohol abuse violated university regulations as well as the standards of their national office. They knew that I knew this.

This was also true in Peter's study. During a community meeting about damage to a men's bathroom, I [Peter] sat and listened to a group of students lament about not knowing who was responsible and the cost to repair the damage. Men stood up at this meeting and recited eloquent soliloquies about the need for those who damaged the bathroom or those who knew who did it to come forward and "do what is right for the community." Not surprisingly, no one came forward during the hour and a half meeting. Later that evening, I was in a room where a group of men chastised the vandal for his lack of responsibility. Surprisingly, it was the very same group of men whom hours earlier castigated their peers for not telling. When I inquired about this inconsistency, the men reminded me about the group's unswerving allegiance to the unwritten rule of "no narcing" [squealing on friends]. Listening to these heated, not-so-logical, and sometimes self-righteous exchanges in the community meeting and post-meeting caucus revealed much about student life. I was elated to be granted permission to

witness these exchanges "behind closed doors," but wondered whether I might be able to write about the situation.

Westley [Van Maanen, 1983] explained how researchers who spent time with the police were likely inadvertently to enter into a silent bond of mutual protection — a bond supported by the "no rat rule." Since many of the agreements between the researcher and the respondents are tacit, we wondered if the respondents in our respective studies expected us to abide by the "no-rat rule," which was an integral value of their respective culture.

Throughout our fieldwork, we took painstaking care to respect the practices of these cultures. Yet when we got to the writing phase of the research, we faced a dilemma whether to abandon or to respect the cultural norms. If we remained true to the relationships that we developed, then we would violate our responsibility as authors. If we remained true to our role as authors, we would violate cultural norms. Opting for the latter has the potential to harm ourselves because we violated the norm of trust between the researcher and respondent — the most fundamental cornerstone of qualitative research. When doing fieldwork we concern ourselves with violating a person's privacy, keeping promises of confidentiality, and harming others by our actions and inaction. When writing our stories, we recognize our internally generated ethical code and attempt to be true to it.

Writing responsibilities

The dissemination of research findings provides opportunities for respondents, the larger community and the author to reflect, assess, and act. As a result, they elicit a range of reactions including surprise, anger, alienation, and pleasure. Ironically, the result of the research — the written product — is harmful despite the researcher's aim of minimizing harm throughout the fieldwork.

Various sources exist for the fieldworker seeking direction about ethical decisions regarding the doing and writing of fieldwork [Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Van Maanen, 1988]. Fewer sources go beyond the ethical obligation of fair and sensitive writing. This too is easier

said than done. Bogdan and Biklen [1982] provided a list of ethical guidelines; item #4 recommended that the researcher —

> tell the truth when you write up and report your findings. Although for ideological reasons you may not like the conclusions you reach, and although others may put pressure on you to show certain results that your data do not reveal, the important trademark of a researcher should be his or her devotion to reporting what the data revealed" [p. 50].

As our stories reveal, the process of writing is more complex than getting the facts and printing them. It is not as clear-cut and "objective" as that. Writing is a political act [Glesne and Peshkin, 1992] that has consequences. The writer controls what is written. When fieldworkers write up reports, they "inevitably betray the trust and confidence some informants have placed in them" [Van Maanen, 1983]. Fieldworkers have an ethical commitment to further dialogue and interact with respondents after the writing.

Conclusions

This paper explored three ethical questions: [1] what constitutes harm; [2] do qualitative researcher have an ethical obligation to forewarn participants of this inevitable harm; and [3] do qualitative researchers have an ethical obligation to deal with the aftermath of their findings. The examination of professional standards, administrative practices, methodological procedures and our fieldwork stories captures the numerous ways harm is defined in qualitative research. The analysis of our tales suggests that researchers have an ethical obligation to forewarn participants of inevitable harm and have an ethical responsibility to interact with respondents long after the fieldwork phase of the research is complete. We conclude with some lessons learned from our struggles with minimizing harm: First, harm is an inevitable outcome of fieldwork, but the acknowledgment of this does not mean that researchers can absolve themselves of the responsibility to struggle with this realization. Second, understanding the unique relationship between qualitative researchers and respondents is necessary before one can respond to the dilemma of doing harm. Third, professional standards, administrative practices, and methodological procedures are a necessary but insufficient guide for ethical practice in qualitative research. Fourth, researchers must allow

the context to guide ethical decisions. Fifth, dialogue with respondents about harm should be an on-going process beginning with gaining access and continuing long after the publication of the research findings. Finally, dialogue amongst the qualitative research community is essential. Thinking about harm and dialoguing with other researchers does not eliminate harm, but can at least lead to greater consciousness.

This paper argues against the use of recipes, models, or platitudes for solving ethical dilemmas, while simultaneously advocating: collaboration between the researcher and respondents to dialogue, question, and struggle with dilemmas; that we recognize and acknowledge that writing is a political process; and that the rejection of suggestions to "sugar-coat" or sanitize findings to "soften" the harm to respondents. Instead, we recommend that researchers begin their fieldwork with heightened sensitivity to these issues. Raising consciousness about ethical dilemmas inherent in fieldwork and in writing increases the possibility that researchers can address these issues in planning and conducting their research. We are, as Eisner [1991] exclaimed, "destined to remain without rules in matters of ethics. Perhaps that is as it should be, a certain sign that all of us are 'condemned' to a significant measure of freedom" [p. 226].

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